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The Place of the
Popular Element in Art Music

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**THE PLACE OF THE POPULAR ELEMENT
IN ART MUSIC**

BY

ELIZABETH ELLICE SMOOT

THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1915

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

June 1,

1915.

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ELIZABETH ELLICE SMOOT,

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC.


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Instructor in Charge

APPROVED:

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THE PLACE OF THE POPULAR ELEMENT IN ART MUSIC

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THE PLACE OF THE POPULAR ELEMENT IN ART MUSIC

I. Introduction

Two styles enter into the so-called popular music: first, the simple, easy music of the common people, which includes folk songs and salon music; and second, the plebeian commonplace compositions, such as rag-time. On the other hand, art music, too, includes two classes: first, the classical, or that belonging or pertaining to the eighteenth century style when form was predominant,- this represents the pure presentation of abstract Beauty; second, the romantic, which is characterized not so much by form as by subjectivity,- the romantic school suggests Beauty tinged with emotion.

Art and Popular music have been and are still so intermingled that many times the former becomes popularized; and very much oftener, the latter comes to be accepted as art music. Thus, parts of Mozart's and Weber's operas are now popularized; and Handel's 'Largo' has so become the possession of the common folk that it is heard almost too often to be called an art work.

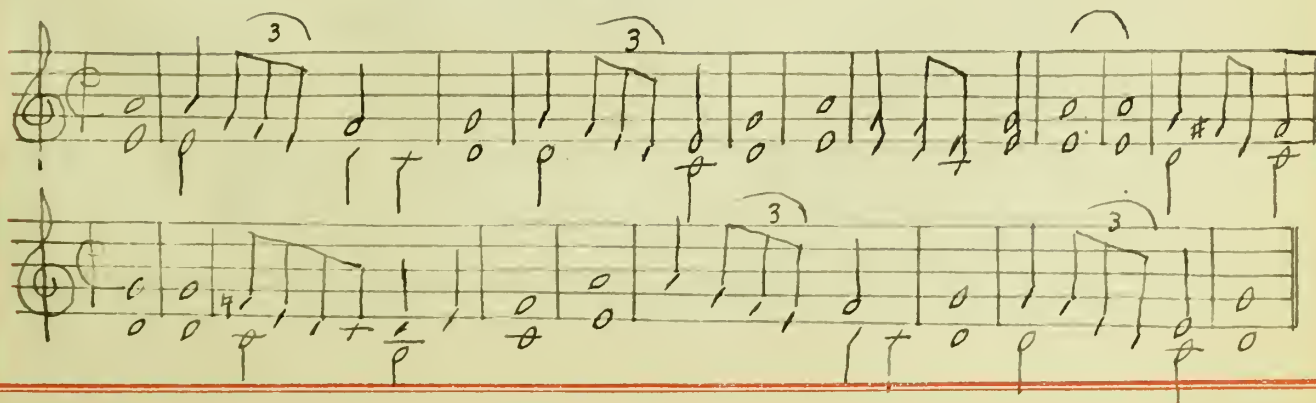
II. Beginnings of Popular and Art Music

In its earliest development, music grew along two lines: first, as a mode of popular expression, second, as an art. The cultivation of art music began only when the medieval priests began to arrange a liturgy for their church service. Long before this, however, it had existed as a language of popular expression: and in these beginnings, music was derived not so much from the song as from the popular dance; so in Italy, the first national seat of art music, harmonized chant was supplanted by a rhythmic dancing measure, and the Pifferari tunes resulted as one of the first products. 'The Pastoral Symphony' in

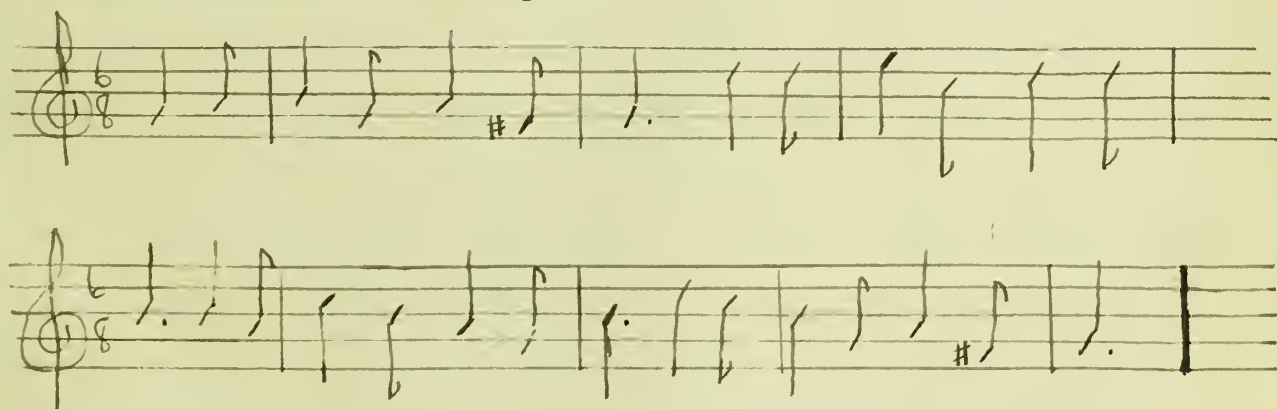
"The Messiah" has reference to these old Pifferari tunes; it is based upon a simple little street tune that Handel heard in Rome at Christmastime.

When art music began,- at the time when the priests were arranging a liturgy,- a number of scale-modes and several song forms developed. It is with these musical forms that this subject is concerned. The motet had a gay, lively tune with secular, profane words at first; but later it came to be applied to church music form of moderate length which was written for several voices and unaccompanied. The madrigal was usually written in the church modes but was secular in character; it consisted of a short pastoral or love poem set contrapuntally for two or more voices without accompaniment. With its appearance a great wealth of vocal polyphony appeared nearly equal to that which grew with the mass. The madrigal was the art song of the sixteenth century,- it was the real representative of the chamber music of its time: the terms motet and madrigal were interchangeable for a long time however. As early as 1285, Adam de la Halle took a number of these songs of the day, arranged them to form a story, connected them with dialogue of his own invention, and produced a sort of opera, "Robin and Marion." The madrigal plays of a slightly later day are quite similar.

Robin and Marion:



With the motet and the madrigal, grew the mass; it was built upon a plain song, called a cantus firmus, and was harmonized only along the purest contrapuntal lines. The mass became the most extensively recognized musical form of the church and reached its height during the latter part of the sixteenth century. Very early, the plain chant, or principal theme of the mass came to be taken from the refrain of some popular madrigal or motet. Du Fay, in the fifteenth century, was probably the first to take the cantus firmus from a secular, or perhaps even a profane song. After his use of a popular melody for a sacred text, the abuse spread so rapidly that contrapuntists forgot the purpose of the ceremony in their efforts to display their ingenuity in counterpoint and fugue. The famous mass, "L'Homme Arme", illustrates the use of the popular cantus firmus; it was founded on an old French love song:



In the latter part of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries, the rise of instrumental music and opera introduced such newly invented harmonies as the unprepared seventh. At first these were used only in the popular, secular music,- Monteverdi used them only thus; but as the canti firmi came to be culled from the popular airs, so their popular harmonizations were gradually introduced into the church

music and caused the decay of the mass because they broke all the traditions of the purely polyphonic mass of former days.

The religious music, which was the nearest akin to art music of any existing for a long time, was unaccompanied for many decades; but as instruments came to be used, those upon which the popular dance tunes were played were slowly accepted. The bag pipe which one associates with the Italian shepherds' Pifferari tunes was one of the first to be accepted; later the reeds which were afterwards used in the development of the organ were introduced into the religious service. It has always been thus that the instruments of popular usage have gradually been accepted in art music; and it began when the early Christians slowly adopted those instruments previously used in the dance.

III. The National Element in Art Music

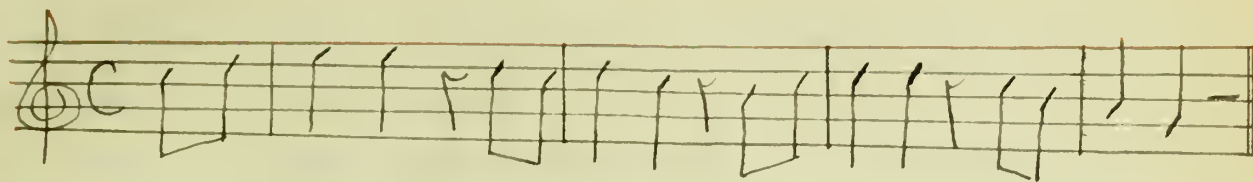
The strains which are poured forth by an enthusiastic people, which really give utterance to the popular emotion are the first origin of national music and give it an indelible stamp. National music developed largely from the folk song: this is a simple form in which a good 'round' tune, once made, serves for every stanza; and it is at all times the people's song. For a long time, the Neapolitan composers neglected the songs of the people; this was, to a degree, unfortunate because many spontaneous folk songs were lost; on the other hand, it was a blessing, for their neglect aided in preserving for a much longer time the character and originality of such music,- for when artists began to interest themselves in folk song, it began to decline. Nationalism in music is almost entirely the resultant of folk song used extensively among the common people and consists largely of folk melodies and their characteristics introduced in art music.

Thus when Smetana set himself the task of making Bohemian music more Bohemian, more national, he first collected all the folk tunes he could find, wrote songs with folk characteristics, and published them. Luther used the popular folk tunes in his hymn books, and the love and favoritism for his hymnody in Germany sprang from these popular settings. Brahms, when composing, liked to think of the words of a folk song because this seemed to suggest themes to his mind. The nationalism in the compositions of these men is due largely to this use of folk melody in their writings.

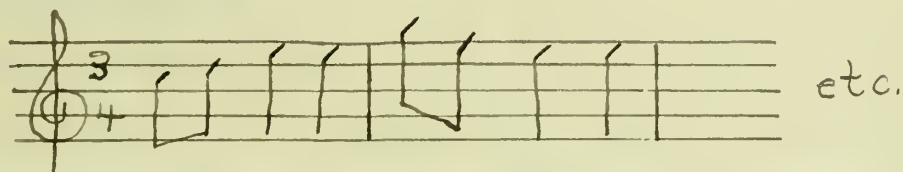
It has been written that every German of great name has been far more greatly indebted to the popular element than were the great Italian musicians in their day. This statement may be extended to include most modern composers. There is very little of the popular in much of Bach's music, one must climb to his higher plane in order to listen; yet in his "Passion of St. Mathew", and in many of his cantatas, the chorale is a potent factor. In this oratorio, Bach made repeated use of the melody of a popular love song by Hassler. Its original title was, "My Spirit is Distracted," but Bach enriched it with noble counterpoint and made a fitting setting for, "Oh, Sacred Head Now Wounded."

Handel's use of the popular tune in his 'Pastoral Symphony' of "The Messiah" has been mentioned before. It is very interesting to study the use of the national in art music from the time of these men down to our own age.

Weber used Turkish music,- the most limited and most monotonous of all Oriental music - in his "Oberon." Here is the phrase used by Weber, first as a march upon which a brilliant solo could be made:



Later, in the same work, Weber makes it a dance tune sounded by the horn of the Fairy King:



Mozart, with his wonderful ingenuity, took this same little popular tune, inverted the melody and put it in the minor and used it in "Die Entführung" thus:



Beethoven did not enter so deeply into the spirit of folk song as did other German composers; yet he studied and used to some extent even foreign folk music. In his string quartet dedicated to Count Razoumowski, he used two themes from a Russian folk song in the collection published by Protsch in 1815; and in the Scherzo of his "Seventh Symphony," he used an old folk melody for the theme of his trio; while he makes characteristic use of a hop-waltz in his "Sixth Symphony"; finally, he arranged a whole series of Scotch folk songs for the publisher, Thomson, of Edinburgh.

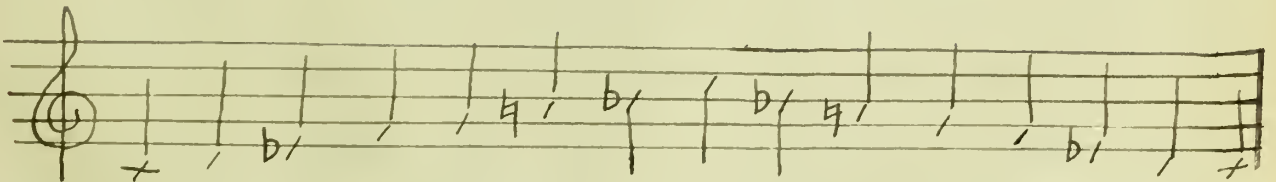
Many Germans of great name have tried to imitate Scottish folk music,- Robert Franz, Schumann, Volkmann, Max Bruch, and others; but Mendelssohn was the only really successful one. In his Scotch Sym-

phony, he has a duet, "O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast" which is a true example of Scotch music.

Irish and Welsh popular music have not yet come into their own; yet Doctor Villiers Stanford has used some Celtic themes (notably "The Red Fox") in his Irish Symphony; and F. H. Cowen has used Welsh tunes in his Welsh Symphony.

Weber, who was foremost and the most satisfactory of all composers in his use of what may be called "wild" music has availed himself of the Chinese national music in the overture of "Taurandot" which is a translation of Carl Gozzi's Chinese "Fiaba."

Chopin idealized the Polish national dances to a degree never known before or since. His intimate knowledge of the folk song and national melodies from his earliest childhood enabled him to imbue his compositions with that feeling of delicate melancholy so characteristic of Polish national music, without the loss of individual expressiveness. He made excessive use of a scale scheme upon which the Polish "dumka" (song of sorrow) is built. This dumka reflects much of the nation's history and is built upon a minor scale with a major sixth and a minor seventh, thus:



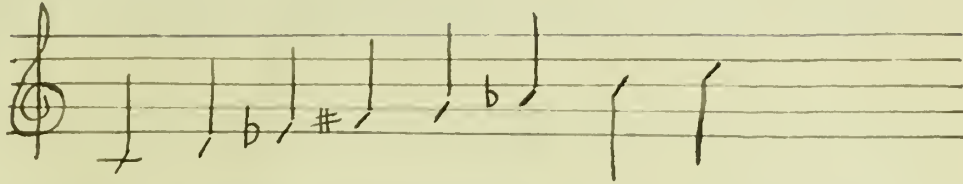
Liszt lived for some time with the roving, untutored gypsy bands in Hungary that he might acquire from them the complete freedom and the consecration for nature that is the indispensable element of all art-creation. His "Hungarian Rhapsodies" are therefore based in de-

tail upon the wild music of these untrained, roving people and have much of the same spirit as does theirs. In some of Liszt's most effective passages, he makes free use of the czardas, a species of Hungarian jigs.

In his "Modern Musical Drift", Mr. Henderson says that modern music is based upon the portrayal of human emotions, those things common to us all: so he says that Wagner's "Parsifal", failing to symbolize a popular sentiment, is the "feeble child of his artistic sensibility". Whether or not this be true, Wagner's greatest works were those in which the legends were symbolical of human passions, as in "Tannhauser", and "Tristan und Isolde", in which Brangäne portrays the common work-a-day serving woman, not an unreal character.

There seems to be a notion that Brahms refused to challenge the current, popular tendencies in art and literature and that he held himself aloof; but this is untrue. He ranks with Bach in counterpoint and with Beethoven in musical architecture; but he is as simple and tender in his songs as was Robert Burns in his poems, and Burns was the "people's own" writer. His original songs number very nearly two hundred, and the proportion of the lyrics based either upon real folk songs or written in a style imitative of national music is very large. With a number of other important compositions, his opus one hundred three appeared in June, 1896; this is a collection of "Gypsy Songs" written for four voices in the style of Hungarian gypsy music and with all its rhythm and swing. He wrote Hungarian Rhapsodies in a truly national style, though he, himself, was a German: yet he studied foreign music - which term in itself pre-supposes a nationalism in music - to such an extent that he used the mixed scale so extensively as to

give his music an intensely foreign coloring (as a result of his study of Hungarian music). Here is the mixed scale which he used so much:



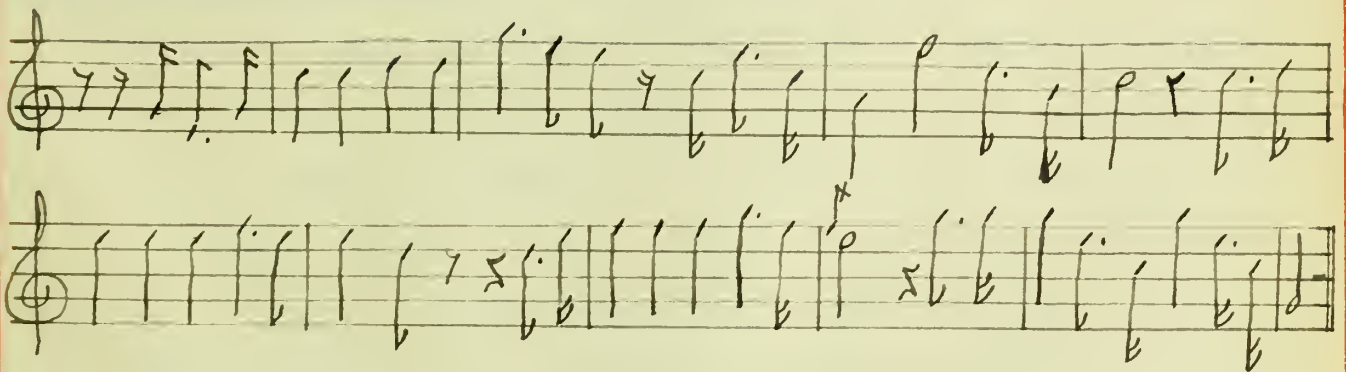
He also arranged a number of national melodies for four hands under the title, "Hungarian Dances". These are the first two books of his most popular works; and in these twenty-one dances, Brahms is said to have caught the color, swing, mad melancholy, and reckless joy of the Hungarian spirit more than Liszt himself did in his "Rhapsodies"; so probably a half dozen or more of the "Dances" will outlive Liszt's "Rhapsodies". In his B-flat sonata for the "Hammer-Klavier", the andante is built upon the theme of an old German Minnelied, the words of which began, "Verstohlen geht der Mond, blau, blau Blümelein". The left hand plays eight single tones, then both hands play in transparent four-part harmony to imitate the chorus.

"The Triumphlied", published in 1872, one of the most perfect of Brahms' smaller choral works, consists of three broadly planned choruses, the first--"Hallelujah, praise the Lord"--introducing the German national hymn, "Heil dir im Sieger-kranz",-- and the third an old chorale, "Now thank we all our God". The first theme, "Heil dir im Sieger-kranz", is the same melody as our "America", so is well-known in our country.

The 'Overture' to "The Academic Festival", which was published in 1879 when Brahms received his honorary degree, Ph. D., is essentially popular in character; it is built upon three popular student songs,

"Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus", "Der Landesvater", and "Was kommt dort von Höh" and ends with "Gaudeamus". These three student songs are ingeniously and marvelously woven together into a whole or a unit.

There has been much dispute regarding the writer of the "Marseillaise". It is claimed by some that the melody was taken from an old German mass by Holtzmann, quickened in time, and was then given to the people; others say that Rouget de Lisle wrote the original. The discussion of its authorship does not concern this subject particularly; but it is important to note that the "Marseillaise" sprang up among the French people and became so popular among them that it has dominated their music since Napoleon's time. Its characteristics are noticeable in very much of French art music as well as popular. Here is the "Marseillaise" copied from the original by Dannbach of Strassburg under the title "Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin, dédié au Maréchal Lukner ":



Within recent years, a new nation has come before the eyes of the musical world--Russia; and with Russia, as with practically all other nations, in order to find the true origin of her art music, it is necessary to search in her religious music and in her popular songs,

The national song is a sure guarantee of the value of Russian music. Glinka was the pioneer of her national music; the people refused to accept Rubenstein as representative because of his German influence and even Tschaikowsky because he was too cosmopolitan. Glinka, nourished by the aid of the popular song, sought with inimitable perfection to preserve its character in immortal works, and by means of it to paint the Russian people in their national characteristics. The effect and originality of Russian popular song is such that every composer since Glinka has sought to put them to use. Their theme is always short, and they confine themselves within a narrow limit of compass, rarely surpassing a fifth or a sixth,- the older the song, the smaller the compass. In 1790, Protsch published a collection of these popular songs, and in 1815, he published a second edition; but as yet, Russian folk music has scarcely been touched; the songs of the Cossacks have not been collected and published, and those of Little Russia have not been classified or printed.

Smetana has been mentioned as the father of Bohemian national music; but before leaving the subject, one must first mention his pupil, Dvorák. Smetana succeeded in inculcating into Dvorák the love for the national spirit in music which he himself had; and Dvorák has carried the banner of Bohemian music all over the world. In fact, he came before the public as a composer only after he wrote the national cantata or hymn to the words, "The Heirs of the White Mountain", by Halek. The spontaneous and thoroughly national character of this music ensured its success. Later he published a collection of duets, "Klänge aus Mähren", in which national characteristics prevailed; and a series of "Slavische Tänze" succeeded these. Dvorák's chamber com-

popular works, although standing side by side with them are those which show the talent and brain of a master artist; for example, "Warum Sind denn die Rosen so Blass?" is popular, while on the other hand, "Nur wer die Schusucht Kennt" is fit company for the best songs of Schubert and Schumann. Tschaikowsky's opus seventy-two has eighteen pieces some of which are graceful but suitable only for the salon, such as "Berceuse", "Impromptu", and "Meditation"; while others in the group are worthy to rank among the best. Tschaikowsky is not alone in his salon compositions by any means, but he serves as an especially good example because he was practically unknown as a composer until he won his way into the salon.

V. Popular and Art Music in America

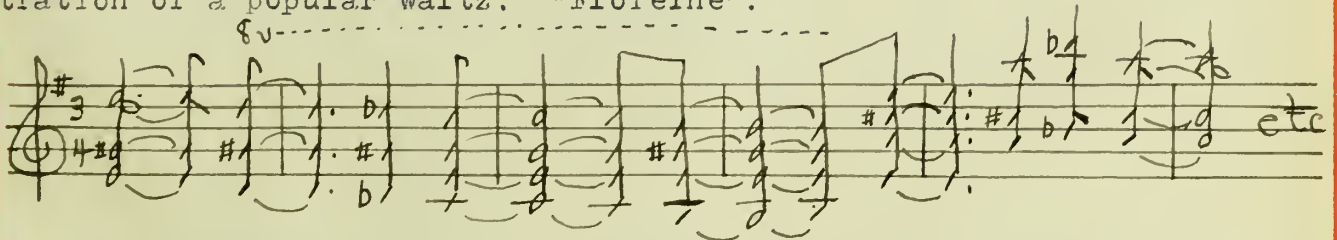
In America, the romantic plantation life of the South has found expression in much folk music; while this is negro music, it is the southern life and surroundings that has given rise to it, hence it is essentially American. Besides this southern popular song,- and much of our negro music well worthy of presentation has not yet been collected,- a northern man, Stephen C. Foster from Pennsylvania has enlarged our folk music very much by writing a series of beautiful and typical folk songs based on southern plantation life; he has also made collections of folk music. In America as in perhaps no other country, music must be based to a considerable degree upon the popular. It must be surrendered to the people, domiciled by them, and must grow up among them or it can not permanently exist here. It must be made popular not by debasing the art but by interesting the people as a nation in music; for as in any new country, our people have given more time to commercial prosperity and wealth than to art. Our per-

formers must be native; it is thus and only thus that we can develop a wealth of national music. America, like Russia, is a world in itself, and each section will be likely to have its own folk song; it is even possible that a newer school of popular melody may yet develop in the United States from the free and unrestrained ranch life of the West. Our national music--for we may be said to have already developed a national character in much of our music--is just beginning to come into its own in art compositions. When Dvorak lived in this country, he taught our native composers a lesson by using some of our plantation themes in his "New World Symphony" and in some classical chamber music. G. W. Chadwick was the first American writer to use our own folk tunes in a classical work; in two of his symphonies, he has used some distinctly American themes.

MacDowell, another of our native composers has used American folk tunes to develop his "Indian Suite".

Vl. Ragtime Music

If there is one above all other characteristics of ragtime music, it is the syncopated rhythm, in fact this sort of composition consists solely of successive and continuous syncopation. Here is an illustration of a popular waltz: "Floreine":

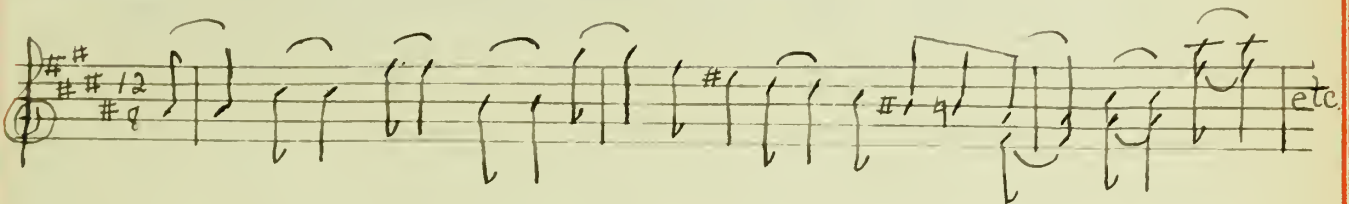


It can readily be seen that if the syncopation were removed and the rhythm left simpler thereby, there would be little left. There is a very noticeable tendency in modern art music to use in one way or

another this important characteristic of the "rag" tune. The following is a sketch from the symphonic poem "Die Toteninsel" by Rachmaninow:



and here is one from Brahms' D-major symphony, opus 73:



It has been said that the miserable trashy "rag" is like absinthe --it kills the better understanding; and this may be true to some extent under certain conditions, for instance, a continuous diet of such for the amateur. Ragtime songs, so-called popular, such as the "Chanticleer Rag" or "I Want to be in Dixie" seem to be of no particular use in the world; and perhaps the most favorable thing that may be said of them is, as Mr. Linclon said, "for those who like this sort of thing, this is about the sort of thing they would like". It seems, however, that the vulgarity or common-ness of these songs is more in the text than in the music itself. It has always been impossible to draw a line between an absolute vulgarity in music, and a simple, elementary kind of seriousness.

It is argued by some that there is a place for even the worst of it, that a liking for the commonest music is a step in progress. In the physical world, an infant cares for infantile things, the child for youthful things, and the adult for mature things; may it not be so

in music? If so, "ragtime" is only a first step in one's musical education. The thing which is dangerous in our American society in that case is that just as a young man--it is true more of the man than of the woman--is ready to pass from this plebeian stage, his attention is diverted from music; as soon as he prepares for college or enters business, he generally falls outside the range of musically uplifting influences.

There is something attractive about this sort of popular music, something which appeals to the common taste just as folk song has always done and still does; and those who care for it go on buying it, even many musicians of high rank, "who are human enough to come out of the clouds", playing it for relaxation. After all, no music is essentially bad,- a good two-step is better than a poor sonata; and anything is good if it serves the purpose for which it was intended.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, only this need be said, that there is every indication that the popular will have its place in art music and the two will be as closely intermingled in the future as they have been since the era when the *canti firmi* for the early masses were taken from the popular tunes of the day.

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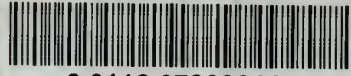
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